

# LISTENING STRATEGIES USED BY THE ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*Listening is one of the essential skills in learning a foreign language. Some students can listen to English very well because they use proper listening strategies, but many students cannot. This study aimed to investigate frequency of using listening strategies used by English-majored students at Tay Do University. There were nineteen English majored students were randomly selected to participate in this study through an interview. The interview questions involve the use of strategies when listening to English such as keyword strategy, inferring based on background knowledge and guessing the meaning of words based on the context. The results of this study show that all strategies were helpful to students. However, the frequency with which the strategies were used is quite different. The strategies of using keyword and guessing the meaning of words based on context were used more than inferring based on background knowledge. Through this research, a few suggestions were given to help the students in their listening process.*

**Keyword:** *Listening strategies, Use of listening strategies, Strategies in listening comprehension*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that today English has become a global language. Most countries in the world have introduced English into the educational program very early. For example, in Vietnam, from elementary school students have learned English and even at university level, there are an English linguistic major to students choose and learn about this major. Moreover, English is also a language that connects people around the world together without the barrier of each country's distinct language

Listening is an indispensable skill in language learning as well as English. However, at the beginning of language learning and until higher grades, listening is not emphasized. Listening almost accounts for 40 to 50 percent of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing when learning English. Listening helps us gather a lot of information to solve problems and to behave appropriately. But not everyone can hear well and know how to listen effectively. In fact, most students face some difficulties, especially difficulties in unfamiliar vocabulary when listening English. If students only listen to English in a simple way, listen in the usual way (that is, listen without thinking), they will definitely be interrupted by their limited understanding. Using strategy is one of the secrets to solve the problem and also makes the listening process more effective. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of English listening strategies by English-majored students at Tay Do University.

### Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following research question:

What strategies do English-majored students at Tay Do University use when listening to English?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definitions of listening

Listening is an indispensable skill when learning a foreign language, because if you can't hear it, you won't understand what other people want to convey. Listening has been typically defined by many researchers.

Chastain (1971) defined listening as understanding everything native speakers say at normal speed. Morley (1972) said "listening involves auditory discrimination, aural grammar selecting necessary information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning". According to Postovsky (1975), "listening

differs in meaning from sound discrimination to aural comprehension". Goss (1982) defined: Listening is a process that involves listening, understanding and putting it into a meaningful order of words. Bowen, and Helferty (1985) demonstrated that: Listening means understanding and capturing information through oral language.

According to Purdy (1997), listening is a process that involves taking in information, making sense of it in response to a question or a message, a certain non-verbal. Rost (2002) defined listening "as a complex process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know". Listening helps us to know what is going on around us and is also one of the important factors that make up a successful communication. Jafari and Hashim (2015) emphasized that :listening is a channel for comprehensible input and more than 50 percent of the time learners spent in learning foreign language is devoted to listening, communication also listen, watch movies also listen and read books also listen.

According Clark and Clark (1977), listening also includes processing the information we hear with our auditory senses to help us perceive what's going on and what the other person is trying to say. In order to be effective listeners, foreign language learners need to monitor their attention to and interpretation of these clues. It is our hypothesis that attending and interpreting is accomplished more effectively when students know when and how to bring to bear their knowledge of the world and of the foreign language in processing auditory information".

Listening is receiving language through the ears, we use our ears to receive individual sounds (letters, stress, rhythm and pauses) and we use our brain to convert these into messages that mean something to us.

## 2.2 The strategies of listening English

### *Keywords*

Using keywords helps you understand the gist of the context. Suppose when you hear some words like: 'Travel', 'Paris', 'last year', you will guess what the keyword is referring to. The problem is like you traveled to Paris last year. As you listen attentively to those key words and understand the main idea of the passage, you will gradually be able to guess every little idea in the passage. Oxford (1990) states that Keyword strategy combines sounds and image where learners can remember more easily what they hear or read in the new language. On the other hand, the keywords in the listening lesson and you are a person who often has difficulty listening. When listening to English with audio such as listening to music or watching movies, English-speaking videos often have keywords that are emphasized by the speaker. , those keywords help you easily identify the meaning of the word, easy to guess what the sentence is about. Keywords in audio or video clips when listening. You can most accurately guess what will happen next. The strategy of listening to keywords is one of the important strategies in the process of learning English listening.

### *Inference based on background knowledge*

If you hear a word you don't understand, try to guess the meaning of the word based on the real situation, experiences, everyday behaviors that we have before, from there to understand what they are saying, what to do in those cases. This is the strategy of inferring meaning: using clues and knowledge about a situation to make sense of what we hear. According to Rosenblatt (1985) "Building a rich mental model when listening or reading a passage requires the integration of new information with our prior knowledge". This integration has been described as a transaction between a passage and our personal and world knowledge, as well as the passage and other passages we have heard or read. Even if one knows all vocabulary words in a passage, a lack of background knowledge can be detrimental to comprehension. Beside, Culture plays an essential role, not only in the perception of learners in general but also in learning foreign languages in particular, it can be said that students who do not have cultural knowledge about British, American or other foreign countries. Other English speakers may not fully understand how native speakers think through English. Because background knowledge is one of the factors affecting the ability to reason as well as learn and store vocabulary, it can be considered as the foundation for building a rich mental model for listening comprehension

### *Guessing the meaning of the word in the context of use*

Context is the surrounding information in the text or the subject matter of the text. When faced with a long listening passage that contains a lot of new words. You may be shocked because it is difficult to know what those words mean, the strategy of guessing the meaning of words will work in this case. According to Alfred Marshall (2020) showed "In common usage, almost every word has many shades of meaning, and therefore needs to be interpreted in context". Dell Hymes (1972) observed that knowing what goes on outside the school setting is necessary to understanding what goes on inside. He noted further that "the key to understanding language in context is to start not with language but with context ...and then to# systematically relate the two"

To learn a second language is not easy. Most of us, even the most advanced, cannot know or hear all the words that native speakers use, so in some cases, people are forced to guess the meaning of words based on the context. Listening is thought as "interplay" between language and brain which requires the " activation of contextual

information and previous knowledge” where listeners guess, organize and confirm meaning from the context. Linguists believe that a listener is involved in guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, interacting and organizing by associating and accommodating their prior knowledge of meaning and form. According to Rost (1990) thinks, “listeners “co-author” the discourse and they construct it by their responses”.

### 2.3 Previous studies

A study investigating the use of listening strategies by students in five Mexican universities conducted by Chulim (2008) showed that the most frequent use of strategies was focusing on specific information, while taking notes and using prior knowledge were used the least. Significant differences were not found across universities in listening strategies used, but were found across levels of English.

Goh (2002) looked into the mental tactics or specific techniques through which a general strategy is operationalized. The subjects were Chinese learners of ESL in Singapore. Immediate retrospective verbalizations were conducted to collect data. It was found that, for instance, in order to operate the contextualization strategy, learners related new information to a wider familiar context by using tactics such as placing input in a social or linguistic context, finding related information on hearing a key word, or relating one part of text to another. Similarly, to operate monitoring strategy, the learners might use tactics such as identifying words or ideas not understood, checking current interpretation within the context of the message or prior knowledge, or confirming that comprehension has taken place.

Peacock and Ho (2003) investigated the relationship between the use of LLSs and the proficiency level of 1006 English for Academic Purposes students in eight different majors in Hong Kong. The results of the study showed that there were significant correlations between strategy use and proficiency level. Cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies showed very high correlations with the proficiency level of the participants and were used by high-proficient learners. Compensation strategies, however, were shown to be favored by both high- and low-proficient students.

Carissa (1997) investigated the possible existence of a sequence of use of listening comprehension strategies by advanced ESL learners. Although the results revealed that these students had a similar pattern of strategy use regardless of their gender and English achievement, those students with higher ability in listening comprehension tended to use the following six strategies more often than the other students: self-evaluation, summarization, elaboration, inference, feedback, and reprise. Murphy (1985, as reported in Carissa 1997) worked with 12 intermediate university students and concluded that the high achievers used their prior knowledge, made guesses (inferring), and monitored their comprehension more often than did low achievers.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Participants

In our study, the participants were nineteen students majoring English at Tay Do University. They were eight males and eleven female. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21. All of them were chosen randomly. They were in the process to perfect their second language which was English. They had spent two semesters studying with foreign teachers, which could help them in looking for effective listening strategies. When this research was carried out, they were studying English listening with the course book named “Speak Now”.

### 3.2 Instrument

Interview was used as an instrument in this study. The researcher used 6 open questions to ask the participation about the strategies they often applied in learning listening such as inferring based on background knowledge, guessing words based on context and self-study. The interviews were conducted through Google Meeting platform and each lasted about 30 minutes.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Strategies of using keywords

The results obtained from the online interviews with the participants about the strategy of using keywords showed that all of them used this strategy when listening to English. In the first question, when asked “Do you often use keyword strategies when listening to English?”. A female and a male from English class 14A answers that:

*“Yes I do. When I can't hear well, I try to guess the meaning of the words and try to listen to the important words mentioned in the listening text.” (Female, English translation)*

*“Yes, I tend to listen to the stressed words because I think it's important and needed” (Male, English translation)*

And for the second question, when asked “Do you think the strategy of using keywords makes it easier for you to listen to English?”, two female students answered that

*“I think using keywords when listening to English makes it easier for me to understand because using keyword strategy when listening to English can help me guess the context as well as the situation that the conversation is referring to.” (Female, English translation)*

*“In context I will find the information by listening to the keywords, it will give clues to the words” (Female, English translation)*

It can be seen that the strategy of using keywords was used by most of English-majored students, and it seemed to be very effective. Therefore, it could be applied in many cases to overcome the obstacles in listening.

#### **4.2 Strategies of inferencing based on background knowledge**

In this section, we asked two questions with the desire to learn more about the background knowledge that English majors equipped when listening to English. The first question we asked was “Did you know all the customs, cultures, characters of the British or American when you learn English?” The answer we received was that twelve students admitted that they could understand the listening text in spite of lack of knowledge about the customs, religions and personality of the British or American cultures while the others said that cultural knowledge helped them a lot in listening.

In the second question, we asked “In your opinion, if you don’t have social and cultural knowledge, can you listen to English well?”. Nine over thirteen students thought that they could.

*“I think each the country has a different culture; therefore, if you don't have cultural knowledge, you will have difficulty in listening.”(Female, English translation)*

*“Of course, when I was a kid I didn't know about cultural knowledge but I could understand what people were saying” (Male, English translation)*

It could be concluded that the students did use this strategy in their learning process, but the frequency was not very high. For some students, background knowledge wasn’t a barrier to prevent them from listening to English, but many students recognized the importance of background knowledge and felt that they needed to use this strategy when listening to English

#### **4.3 Strategies of guessing the meaning of the word in the context of use**

To complete the survey, we asked the two last questions about using the strategy of guessing the meaning of words based on the context. The followings were some typical answers from the students.

*“Yes, I do. When listening, I’m usually using the strategy of guessing the meaning of words by using the meaning of the word stand before or behind it, and sometimes I am based on the context of conversation or passage to understand.”(Female, English translation)*

*“Yes, I do use guessing strategy because it can help me work faster and find the main idea of the passage”(Female, English translation)*

All of the students thought that guessing the meaning of words based on context was a necessary strategy when listening to English.

*“Yes, I do, because guessing the meaning of words based on context will help your mind imagine when in that context what words would be suitable. Although the correct rate is sometimes not high, it has also helped relieve your stress when you cannot guess the word”. (Female, English translation)*

*“Yes I think this is really necessary because it will save us time and also make it easier to understand what other people are talking about” (Male, English translation)*

Through the interviews, we could conclude that this strategy was often used effectively by the students.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

In short, after analyzing the important information collected from English majors at Tay Do University, the researcher found that the strategies that English majors used when listening to English were *Keyword strategy*, *inferencing based on background knowledge* and *guessing the meaning of words based on the context of use* in which the *keyword strategy* and *the strategy of guessing the meaning of words based on the context* were mostly used by the participants and *the inference strategy based on background knowledge* was still applied but the percentage was quite lower in comparison with the other strategies.

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